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SUBJECT: HERAT ELECTIONS UPDATE

Ref: 09 Kabul 2260; 09 Kabul 1663; 09 Kabul 1662

11. (U) Summary: Presidential candidate activities in Herat, especially of President Karzai, continue. Other candidates have become more active in the province, as well. According to the provincial leader of Harakat-e Islami, the party has split. One faction now supports Abdullah Abdullah, while the original group continues to support Karzai. The IEC's Provincial Election Officer (PEO) has made notable progress in hiring and training of election officials down to the district level, but said more hiring is to come in the days leading up to August 20. A minimum contingent of long-term observers has already arrived and set up in the province. End summary.

Presidential Campaigns Robust, but PC Candidates Notably Absent  
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12. (U) Following Abdullah Abdullah's campaigning in Herat, two more major presidential candidates, Ashraf Ghani and Mirwais Yasini, have personally campaigned in the province. Both conducted rallies in the largest conference hall of the province, the "2000 seat hall," filling it with supporters. Ghani has some support among the very well-educated and intellectuals of Herat, who consider him the best qualified and smartest of the candidates, but acknowledge he has little chance of achieving the second most number of votes after Karzai to challenge in a second round. Yasini has fewer supporters in Herat but appears to have a fairly well-financed campaign with as many posters and banners up as Ghani.

13. (U) One minor presidential candidate also brought his campaign to Herat. Sayyed Jalal Karim (nicknamed Genius, or "Nabagha" because he reportedly completed high school at age eight) spoke to about 3000 persons in the Herat Stadium on July 31. Young male supporters, distinctively dressed in gray suits and green shirts, after the rally said they support him because of his intellect, youth, and platform. Karim is one of the few candidates to distribute brochures with a full-blown platform, divided by sectors. Local media also reported in the past two weeks continuing campaign rallies for Karzai (including Kuchis who came to Herat city), Abdullah, and Ghani in Herat city and some districts, and for hometown presidential candidate, Mutsembellah Mazhabi (500 women gathered in Herat city).

14. (U) Of all the candidates, Karzai has the largest number and greatest variety of campaign posters and banners, and they are still proliferating on the streets of Herat in expectation of his campaign visit the week of August 8. However, one theme dominates, "Karzai -- the symbol of national unity," stated over and over in his campaign paraphernalia. The Karzai campaign has also promoted education, especially a subtheme that only educated Afghans -- not foreign consultants, engineers, and aid workers -- can develop Afghanistan. Local news depicted about fifty young men zooming around Herat city on motorcycles. They wore white T-shirts and caps emblazoned with Karzai's portrait, a map of Afghanistan, and the words "A vote for Karzai equals a vote for peace and prosperity in Afghanistan." One of these young men spoke with PRT officer. He had a hard time articulating why he supported Karzai but liked the shirt.

A Party Splits, as Abdullah Gains Votes

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15. (SBU) Aug 9, Dr. Mesbah, a medical doctor, prominent Hazara community leader in Herat, and former Director of the Western Zone Afghanistan National Disaster Management Agency (ANDMA), discussed Harakat-e Islami Afghanistan activities in Herat. He explained his party opened an office three weeks ago in Herat, which he heads. His party has split (again), with former Herat Governor (and former Kabul Governor and former Minister of Agriculture) Sayyed Hussein Anwari and seven other Central Council members splitting off to form a new party, "Harakat-e Islami Mardom-e Afghanistan." Anwari and this new party support Abdullah Abdullah, while the core Harakat-e Islami Afghanistan under Kazemi and a majority of the Central Council members support Karzai. Pressed to cite a figure, Dr. Mesbah estimated that Harakat-e Islami Afghanistan has about 5,000 to 10,000 supporters in Herat province, mostly Hazara, and mostly in Herat city. He stated Abdullah has a lot of support in Herat city, probably a majority of the population, but not among Hazara, who solidly support Karzai and whose second choice is Bashardoost. He added that outside of Herat city Karzai has more support than Abdullah. Harakat-e Islami plans to field a small number of election observers in Jibril, the overwhelmingly Hazara section of Herat city.

#### Elections Preparations Continue and Observers Arrive

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16. (U) The Provincial Election Officer (PEO) has hired 85 percent of the almost 11,000 needed staff and the rest are in process. Those needing training have all been hired. A special push is being made to hire two female checkers per female polling site. Afghan National Police (ANP) staff will check the men, while IEC new-hires will check the women. There are 180 district field coordinators, consisting of 90 teams of two, to cover the 467 polling sites. Each team will cover on average five polling sites, with some in Herat and other urban centers covering more because of geographic proximity, and teams in remote areas covering fewer because of distance and more difficult access. Most election materials have been received.

17. (U) After a five-day closure due to runway repairs, Herat airport received several flights with election materials for the western region. Herat province is fortunate that neither donkeys nor airplanes are required to distribute election materials within the province. PEO staff is busy registering political party and candidate observers, many of whom are getting training as observers by NDI in Herat. Free and Fair Elections Foundation of Afghanistan (FEFA) is active also in recruiting observers, but suffers from lack of capacity in Herat, staffed with only one paid employee who has another job. PEO staff have been distributing educational posters in Dari and Pashto, as well as mock ballots, to civic educators.

18. (U) Two EU observers - an Italian and a Portuguese - and two NDI observers - a Kazakh and a Paraguayan - arrived in Herat. The EU observers expressed frustration because they fall under the UN security blanket and are unable to travel to the districts. PEO welcomed international observers and told PRT he wished there were more in Herat province.

19. (U) Herat PRT representative visited NDI's observer training sessions on August 9; some 30 sessions are scheduled over 15 days in Herat city. Although the training is meant for all provinces in Western Afghanistan, all but one registered observer has been from Herat. NDI staff attributed the lack of participation of observers from Badghis, Ghor, or Farah to the high cost of transport (NDI does not pay travel costs or subsidize participation in any way for the observer trainees) and security, which makes it difficult for observers to get to Herat city. During PRT rep's visit trainees were attentive and their questions reflected they understood the material covered in the session. The August 3 IED attack on the Injil District Police Chief, which killed 14 and wounded approximately 30 persons, had a noticeable impact on NDI's observer training. Projected attendance was down for a couple days after Aug 3, but seems to have rebounded. More than 2200 political parties' and candidates' observers, all credentialed by the PEO, have been trained as of Aug 9, with several thousand more expected to be trained the final week of training.

¶10. (U) Comment: While Karzai still appears to dominate the field in Herat, there are indications that other candidates are gaining traction. At least outwardly, candidate activity seems to be more varied than at the beginning of the campaign season in Herat.

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